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"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS x. 24.

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DIVINITY.

THE GAIN OF DYING.

"Death must be amazing gain."—SOCRATES.

"To die is gain."—ST. PAUL.

THAT the Apostle St. Paul was not only favoured with the plenary inspiration of the Holy Ghost, in common with the other writers of the New Testament, but that he was a man possessing the highest order of intellect,—of a strong and highly cultivated mind, and was well versed in the Grecian, Roman, and Hebrew literature of his day,—is abundantly evident from his education and writings. He was a native of Tarsus, the metropolis of Cilicia, and was by birth a Jewish Roman citizen. At Tarsus, at that time celebrated for polite learning, and "one of the most illustrious seats of the Muses," he was early educated in Greek literature; and when he was removed to Jerusalem, he prosecuted the study of the law and the Jewish traditions, under Gamaliel, a celebrated teacher of that day; in which he himself says that his proficiency was above many of his equals, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers. The proof of this we have in the admirable skill and judgment with which he cites, explains, and applies many passages of the Old Testament in his apologies and Epistles.

That St. Paul has quoted from among the Greek poets, Aratus, Epimenides, and Menander, is universally acknowledged. Some have, indeed, thought that the Apostle has at least referred to other of the Greek writers, as Æschylus, Sophocles, and especially Euripides. The passage, however, from the Apology of Socrates, which stands at the head of this paper, as it has been preserved by Plato, appears to have escaped the notice of those who have written on the literature of the Apostle; and which seems as probably to have met the eye and been in the recollection of St. Paul, as any of those referred to from the Greek poets which have been mentioned. It is not, however, the design of the writer of this article to attempt to prove either that the Apostle (Phil. i. 21) has quoted from, or has any allusion to, the passage from Socrates; but just to notice the coincidence of sentiment and language, and especially to compare the gains of dying, as calculated and described by that greatest of all heathen philosophers, and by the illustrious Apostle of the Gentiles, and all Christian believers.

Plato represents his master Socrates as thus addressing his Judges, and the assembled court, at Athens, before whom he had been cited on a charge of impiety, and of corrupting the Athenian youth, after sentence of death had been pronounced upon him:—"Let us also consider this, that there is great hope that the thing (death) itself is good. One of these two things must be true: either death is a privation of thought, or it is the soul's passage from one place to another. If it be a privation of thought, and as it were a peaceable sleep, undisturbed by dreams, then *Thaumatōn kōros an eis ó thanatos*, 'death must be amazing gain.' Now if death does in any measure resemble such a night, I have justly given it the appellation of great gain; since its whole time is only a long-continued night. If death be a passage from this place to another, and the regions below are a place of rendezvous for those who live here; pray, my Judges, what greater good can a man imagine?—At what rate would not you purchase a conference with Musæus, Hesiod, and Homer? For my part, if such a thing were practicable, I would die a thousand times,

to enjoy so great a pleasure. What transports of joy shall I encounter, when I meet Palamedes, Ajax the Telamonian, and all the heroes of antiquity! But the infinitely greatest and most valuable pleasure will consist in spending the time in putting questions and interrogatories to those great men. Who would not give all he has in this world for a conference with him who led the numerous army against Troy, or Ulysses, or Sisyphus, and a hundred thousand other men and women, whose conversation and discoveries would afford an inexpressible felicity? But now it is time we should all retire to our respective offices; you to live, and I to die. But whether you or I are going upon the better expedition, it is known to none but God alone."

Such was the heaven of Socrates! Such were the views of death, and of the gains of dying, with which this celebrated philosopher endeavoured to cheer the minds of his surrounding disciples and friends, and animate them to virtue and courage, and with which he fortified his own mind in prospect of his approaching final hour. Plato tells us, that having conversed cheerfully with his friends, and having prayed to the gods to bless the voyage he was about to undertake, and render it happy, he drank off the poisoned draught with admirable tranquillity, and, covering himself with his mantle, departed.

These views of death, and of a future and invisible world—gloomy, uncertain, and inconsistent as they are—were the best and most cheering that the Gentile philosophy and theology of the brightest period of heathenism could afford. Death, therefore, to the philosophers of that age, and even to Socrates, the greatest of them, though he speaks of the gain of dying, was, after all—whether, according to their notions, a dreamless night of non-existence, or the entrance into an unknown world—a fearful "leap or plunge in the dark."

This mystery of a future world, which bewildered the philosophers of Greece and Rome, "is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel;" and therefore, St. Paul, at that time a prisoner in bonds at Rome, and, like Socrates, having in prospect a violent death by martyrdom, could say, "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain: having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

If, therefore, Socrates, unjustly condemned to death, was regarded as an example of virtue, forbearance, and courage, by his disciples and the Athenians, while calmly contemplating the event that awaited him, and his state beyond the grave; how much more worthy of our admiration and imitation is the example of the holy and intrepid Apostle, who could say, "The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that

I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God: for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus!"

But not only the holy and inspired Apostle, but the feeblest and meanest believer in Christ, may contemplate death, and look towards eternity, with a more tranquil mind, and with a more courageous heart, than the greatest hero or philosopher of pagan antiquity; for it is his to say, with a confidence which Christianity only can inspire, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Would Socrates be willing, if it were possible, to die a thousand times to purchase a conference with Musæus, Hesiod, Homer, &c.? The Christian knows he has to die but once, to "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God;" and to hold eternal and delightful converse with the wise and good of all ages and nations. Would it fill Socrates with transports of joy to meet with Palamedes, Ajax, and all the other heroes of antiquity? The Christian goes to join the noble army of martyrs and worthies, who look joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and counted not their lives dear unto themselves; and "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to fight the armies of the aliens." He goes to join "the general assembly and church of the first-born, the spirits of just men made perfect, and an innumerable company of angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers." Would Socrates give all that he had in this world for a conference with him who led the numerous army against Troy? The Christian goes through death to see the great Captain of salvation, the mighty Conqueror of sin, and death, and hell, who has "led captivity captive," and who, "having spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them." And though, even under the bright dispensation of the Gospel, the knowledge of a future state is necessarily imperfect; and therefore "it doth not yet appear what we shall be; yet, we know that, when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Did Socrates believe that the infinitely greatest and most valuable pleasure of immortality would consist in putting questions to his great heroes and philosophers? The Christian is taught that his immortal existence will be more nobly and delightfully employed; that he, with the triumphant church and the heavenly hosts, shall "serve God day and night in his temple;" that there is reserved for him in heaven "an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" and that his beatified spirit shall be capacitated to sustain "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

But who can calculate or adequately describe the eternal gain of "dying in the Lord?" We may say that it implies an entire and everlasting exemption from all the evils of this life, and from all the miseries of the world to come; and the endless possession and enjoyment of the honour and happiness of heaven; but mortality must be swallowed up of life, and the kingdom prepared for the saints must be eternally inherited by them, ere it can be known what "God hath prepared for them that love him." To all, therefore, who die the death of the righteous, death is infinite,